

The Heart of Islam

- Saad Rasool

The constitution of a country, of a people, is more than simply the legal provisions written in the constitutional document. In reality the constitution of a nation is a larger body of rules, of written commandments and ethos, which the people follow, irrespective of whether or not these are written into the constitutional document. In legal jargon, these are frequently referred to as ‘conventions’, and in the socio-political or religious sphere, these are dubbed as customs, practices and beliefs. These principles- this underlying narrative of internal beliefs of a people – are just as much a part of the constitutional ethos, as the provisions of law themselves.

In line with this idea, there can be no denying the fact that Islam – or at least the current day interpretation of Islamic ideas and injunctions – forms an integral part of the (majority of our) people’s everyday lives, and thus is an inescapable part of Pakistan’s constitutional ethos.

While the Constitution of Pakistan – through Article 2 (State religion), Article 2A (Objectives Resolution), and Article 227 (Islamic provisions) – has specifically incorporated Islam as part of our national ideology, the truth is that even in the absence of these provisions, some interpretation of Islam would continue to influence and guide the way we live our lives.

Islam, as a result, irrespective of legal nuances, has an over-arching role in the way people of Pakistan approach the different facets of life. It lends colors the way we view the workings of our financial markets, the virtue of our legal paradigm, the efficacy of our educational system, our approach to the war of terror, our opposition and support of foreign super powers, and even our judgment on the morality of those who kill in the name of God!

Therefore, a reform of Pakistan’s laws, our national ideology and our collective trajectory, necessarily entails redefining our idea of Islam.

The truth, as dangerous as it might be to articulate, is that Islam, in current day Pakistan, has been hijacked by a brand of mullahs who hold the dogmatic practice of rituals to be the end-goal of religion. We live in the shadow in a religious ideology, which argues that killing in the name of God, is higher than living to uphold His majesty. We are told that slight differences in the way that another bow before Allah, or calls His name, is reason enough to hate such individuals. Even to kill them. We are told that black is the colour of Shias, and green the colour of Sunnis. We are told that Arabic is good, and English is bad. We have been taught that convictions for rape cannot take place based on scientific evidence because only ocular proof is Islam. We are told that a beard, without a moustache, is a service to the Prophet. We are told that Allah deals in plus and minuses – ten pluses for each time you drink water while sitting down, and ten minuses if you eat from your left hand. That the relationship between God and man is one of barter – if you say some Quranic verse seven times, yours will be Jannah. Otherwise, the torment of hell awaits you. We are told that simply the act of prostrating in the direction of Kaaba is the highest of Ibadaat... irrespective of the darkness that might fill the heart of such supplicator.

But then, within this same religion of peace, we find another path. A path less rooted less in dogma, and more in love. What the mystics call, the Heart of Islam.

As Iqbal once said:

Sajdon Ke Iwaz Firdous Mile, Yeh Baat Mujhe Manzoor Nahi

Be-Lous Ibaadat Karta Hoon, Banda Hoon Tera Mazdoor Nahi.

(To be granted heaven in trade for Sajda is not acceptable to me

I worship you out of love, I am your devout, not a labourer.)

Islam, if it is the religion of peace, must have the deepest nexus with love – the Ishq-e-Haqiqi. Such love, must reach beyond the dogmas of ritualistic practice, into the transcendental world of a soul's submission to the one true reality that is God. It must break free from a scroll of pluses and minuses. It must reclaim the truth that God, and his religion, does not need our saving. It does not need our blood. It does not yearn for our violence. It only demands our love. And the ability to be able to love God through small things, and large. To see Him in the face of a Christian child whose house was burned down by some bigoted zealots in Lahore? To hear His call in the voice of a woman clamouring for justice, against

those who threw acid on her face in Sindh. To see His reflections in the verses of Rumi, in the blasphemy of Mansoor, in the dancing of Bulleh Shah, and in the Shikwa of Iqbal. To know that stillness in His worship, can be dancing. That silence in His presence, can be speech.

A brand of Islam that recognizes the reality of God for what it is: pure love. The reality of religion for what was meant to be: submission. The reality of submission for what it promises: deliverance. To walk a path of love that inspires others to follow. To convert through the beautiful brokenness of the soul, and not through the deafening clamor of a gun!

A realization that His justice is not beholden to the number of witnesses produced. That His punishment, is not bound by the number of lashes delivered. That His law, is not anchored to the suffering and pain administered to those who disobey. That obedience to Him is not linked to the length of one's beard. That walking His path does not need the Shalwar to be above one's ankles.

A fierce belief in the unalterable fact that the truth of God, the truth of Islam, is simply recognition of the truth of ourselves. And our truth lives in the mysteries of love – with Him, and His people.

Only once we reclaim this Heart of Islam, can we ever hope to fight the biases and violence of our society, and introduce a Constitutional ethos that is true to Him, as well as to ourselves.

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